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RR RUEHBW RUEHIK RUEHPW RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #1035/01 1180737
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 270737Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3707
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4407
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001035

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE, SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNANCE DEFICIT AGGRAVATES URBAN KABUL'S PROBLEMS

REF: A) Kabul 469

B) Kabul 249

C) Kabul 112

¶1. (U) Summary: Kabul remains unable to deliver effectively basic municipal services such as electricity, clean water, sewage treatment, and trash collection to its rapidly growing population. Deficits in services delivery are aggravated by poor governance and an inefficient government structure.

¶2. (U) Kabul is failing to deliver basic services to its residents. According to official daily electrical power generation reports, only 30 percent of the city's population receives occasional electricity. The lucky minority who do averaged only three hours of electricity every other day during the recent winter season. Only 20 percent of the city has access to even non-potable tap water according to Germany's Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources. UN Human Settlements Programme Advisor Richard Geier said only 2 percent of Kabul is covered by a sewage system and only 20 percent is served by a solid waste collection service. Based on information provided by Kabul Chief of Police Major General Mohammad Salim Ahsas, there is one police officer for every 750 Kabul residents (Washington, DC has one for every 150 residents).

¶3. (SBU) Kabul residents are increasingly expressing their disappointment with the government through the media and public demonstrations such as the one in the Dasht-e Barchi neighborhood a few months ago, which protested the lack of electricity (ref B). Complaints dwell on the lack of personal security due to crime and the insurgency; poor employment opportunities, electricity and clean water shortages; and the accumulations of trash in the streets. Mohammad Faqir Bahram, one of Kabul's three deputy mayors, believes 70 percent of the city's infrastructure was destroyed during the country's civil war. Even if pre-war infrastructure had not been compromised, it was designed to support not more than a third of today's population. Another deputy mayor, Dr. Hasan Abdullahi, contends that the fundamental issue confronting Kabul is its lack of effective leadership and management. Compounding those deficits, the city's appointed mayor has been changed five times in the last six years.

¶4. (U) Kabul, which already comprises one-sixth of Afghanistan's population, continues to grow because it is the only option for many returning refugees and insurgency-displaced IDPs, neither of whom are likely to return soon, if ever, to their villages. While official statistics are not always reliable, most observers believe Kabul's population increased from under 1 million in 2001 to 4.8 million people today. Kabul is the country's first mega-city.

A Failure of Governance

15. (U) Diffuse authority and obscured lines of responsibility confuse the citizenry and almost guarantee unresponsiveness to their needs. The central government ministries and provincial authorities vie with the municipality for influence and power in Kabul. According to Karine Fourmond of the World Bank's Kabul Urban Reconstruction Project, President Karzai often intervenes in inter-ministerial disagreements over municipal policy. Deputy Mayor Bahram looks to the past for answers to today's problems. He remembers a Kabul that was well run and a cosmopolitan center for tourism in the region when he started working for the municipality 35 years ago. At the time, the municipality had sole authority over basic city functions that are controlled today by several contending line ministries (particularly policing including fire and traffic, city planning, transportation, electricity, water, and public health).

Kabul Loses Revenues, Gains Nothing

16. (U) Not only does a dysfunctional governmental structure compound the misery of an overcrowded war-ravaged city, it causes a hemorrhaging of revenues to line ministries, which transfer those funds to favored provincial constituencies. Kabul is seen as a cash cow by line ministries. Bahram claimed the Ministry of Finance's cancellation last year of the city's authority to collect rental taxes (one month of rent per year) and its transfer of licensing and permitting authorities to ministries resulted in a 40 percent reduction to the municipality's revenue.

Corruption Limits Development

17. (SBU) Extremely low civil service salaries feed corruption, which

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bleeds development budgets. Municipal employee salaries are set nationally and do not adjust for local inflation. This is a particular hardship to municipal employees in Kabul where the international community's presence has increased housing rents dramatically. Average civil service salaries range from USD 45 to 80 per month in a city where the typical rent for a two-bedroom apartment on the outskirts of Kabul is USD 150 per month.

Comment

18. (SBU) The GIROA has already started working through its Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) to improve governance in the provinces. We will explore with our Afghan partners broadening their governance reform focus to include the capital.

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